



U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Hearing
Religious Freedom in Afghanistan: One Year Since the
Taliban Takeover

Panel



Fereshta Abbasi is a Researcher in the Asia division at Human Rights Watch, focusing on research and documentation of ongoing abuses in Afghanistan. For the past seven years she has documented human rights abuses in Afghanistan with different organizations, including Human Rights Watch and the All-Survivors Project. She was previously a legal advisor for the International Development Law Organization (IDLO), where she trained and developed employees' legal skills within the Afghan justice sector. She holds an LLM in International law and Strategic Studies from the University of Aberdeen and was a Chevening Scholar in 2019-2020. Fereshta has also published on human rights issues in the Afghan media.



Anne C. Richard joined Freedom House as a Distinguished Fellow and Afghanistan Coordination Lead in October 2021. Previously, she served as the Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees and Migration in the Obama Administration (2012-2017). Prior to joining the Obama Administration, Ms. Richard was the vice president of government relations and advocacy for the International Rescue Committee (IRC). Earlier in her career, she served in other senior positions at the State Department, at Peace Corps Headquarters, and at the U.S. Office of Management and Budget. As an International Affairs Fellow of the Council on Foreign Relations (1993-94), she was part of the team that created the International Crisis Group. She also was a fellow of the Robert Bosch Foundation in Germany and a Presidential Management Intern.



Joseph Azam is a lawyer, writer, and policy advisor currently serving as the Board Chair for the Afghan-American Foundation, a national non-profit focused on advancing the interests of Afghan-Americans and Afghans. He began his legal practice at the international law firm of Willkie Farr & Gallagher focused on white collar criminal investigations and litigation. He also handled a substantial load of pro bono cases while at the firm, focused mainly on asylum cases involving gender-based and religious-based persecution in Africa. He has held various senior in-house legal roles across industries, including at Oracle, Accenture, HSBC, News Corp, and Infor, where until recently he served as SVP the Company's Global Chief

Compliance & Ethics Officer. Prior to legal practice, his graduate work at the Hagop Kevorkian Center for Near Eastern Studies at New York University focused on Afghanistan and the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Joseph has previously worked with the Institute of State Effectiveness on justice system and anticorruption issues in Afghanistan. Joseph was born in Kabul, Afghanistan and came to the U.S. with his family seeking asylum in the 1980s. His writing has appeared in *Newsweek*, *the San Francisco Chronicle*, *the Hill*, *MTVNew*, *Ethisphere*, and *Lucky Peach Magazine*.